

New Local Projects Section

Values Uniformity, Consistency

A new administrative section, called Local Projects, was formed July 1. It pulls together elements of NDOR's Government Affairs and Roadway Design divisions. There are 13 employees in the section, led by Jim Wilkinson, who reports to Deputy-Director Monty Fredrickson. Units comprising the new section are Liaison Services, Secondary Roads, Special Programs and Urban.

The **Liaison Services Unit**, led by LeMoyné Schulz, coordinates NDOR's administrative support for the Board of Public Roads Classifications and Standards as well as the Board of Examiners for County Highway and City Street Superintendents. This unit also administers certification of incentive funding and verifies local matching of highway allocation funds by counties and municipalities.

Support and Oversight

The other three units administer local "off-system" projects, i.e. roadway (STP), bridge (BR) and transportation-related construction and maintenance projects which are not on the state highway system. These units provide support for local public agencies and oversight of the federal-aid program for local projects. This includes providing assistance while also ensuring that local public agencies comply with laws, rules, regulations, policies and procedures. In turn, this keeps projects eligible for federal-aid reimbursement, which local public agencies rely upon.

The **Secondary Roads Unit**, led by Secondary Roads Engineer LeRoy Juengel, serves municipalities with a population of less than 5,000 and all of

Nebraska's 93 counties. This multifaceted unit is also responsible for administration of the Recreation Roads, Public Lands Highway, Soft-Match Bridge and Emergency Relief programs. Assistant Secondary Roads Engineer Mitch Doht, Highway Local Liaison Technician II's Rich Niedermeyer, Tom Braun and Jim Grupe, and Highway Local Liaison Technician I Judy Borer form this unit.

The **Urban Unit**, headed by Urban Engineer Jim Miller, serves First Class cities and Nebraska's three urbanized areas: Omaha, Lincoln and South Sioux City. This unit tackles some complex projects which frequently involve extensive environmental documents. Off-system Coordinators Patrick Schafer and Raitis Tigeris guide cities through the federal-aid process.



Employees of NDOR's new Local Projects Section. *Front (l to r)* - Jim Pearson, LeMoyné Schulz, Verneda Kelly, Judy Borer, Mitchell Doht, Tom Braun, James Miller. *Back row* - Patrick Schafer, Jim Wilkinson, Raitis Tigeris, Rich Niedermeyer, James Grupe, LeRoy Juengel.

The **Special Programs Unit**, headed by Special Programs Coordinator Jim Pearson, administers the nationally recognized Transportation Enhancement program, Safe Routes to School program, and assists in Lied Main Street and Scenic Byways programs. Examples of enhancement projects are trails and restoration of historic transportation facilities.

The section's Administrative Assistant, Verneda Kelly, keeps the office going. Besides the phones and the mail, she is the section's records and retention coordinator, affirmative action coordinator and much more.

Federal-Aid Process

The reorganization took place in order to improve procedural uniformity and consistency among local projects, with respect to the federal-aid process. Improvement efforts began before formation of the Local Projects Section. A comprehensive manual is in the works which will be a key resource for guiding local public agencies through the federal-aid process. Patrick Schafer, LeRoy Juengel and Mitch Doht of the Local

Projects Section contribute to the team, as well as Frank Rich of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Kendall Tonjes of the Program Management Section and Jack Rosecrans of Communication Division. Several other NDOR divisions provide input as appropriate.

According to section head Jim Wilkinson, it is an absolute necessity for projects involving federal funds to follow the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970. "Even if there are no federal dollars being requested for right-of-way activities, not following the Uniform act could jeopardize federal funding for other phases including construction. Our Right-of-Way Division has increased their involvement and oversight of local projects, and it is paying off." Roxanne Sullivan provides this assistance to local public agencies as the Local Public Agency Right-of-Way Coordinator.

Environmental Issues

Wilkinson also observed that the environmental process needs extra

attention at this time, noting, "It is important to establish a clear process. The challenge is to completely address environmental issues while delivering quality projects in a reasonable amount of time."

Wilkinson's previous position was Corridor Studies Engineer in the Location Studies Section of Planning & Project Development Division. In a way, he has come full circle as one of his prior assignments, from 1994 to 1998, was in Secondary Roads in what was then called Local Liaison Division. "I enjoyed working with county highway superintendents and county officials. They are a very dedicated and skilled group who do a great job for their constituents."

Wilkinson says he is looking forward to working with all local public agencies, FHWA, resource agencies and consulting engineering firms in order to provide Nebraskans with an excellent transportation infrastructure. "As a team, we are responsible for providing a transportation system that meets the needs of Nebraskans." ♦